Comments for Watters Quarry Expansion Project NWP-2020-065

I am writing to object to the Waters Quarry Expansion Project for basalt mining in Oregon. Because the project will impact wetlands and seasonal streams, these ecosystems are extremely important for carbon storage as well as native habitat for fish, amphibians, and insects.

The basalt that would be mined on Liberty Hill could be obtained from other sources in the PNW which are less ecologically important that the selected “wet meadows” area. Specifically, oak/ash forestland and camas plant regions are ecologically rare and need to be preserved. This diverse landscape also offers a multitude of ecologically important wildflowers, as well. Furthermore, camas blooms are not only aesthetically pleasing, but are of historical and cultural significance to the native population in the region.

The hydrology of the proposed plan needs to be further evaluated. When natural flowing water is “cut off” the footprint of the proposed project to be recreated is so large and affects ecologically significant areas of water source for the entire site. This site should be preserved and an alternative area for mining needs to be evaluated and considered.

The permit application states that the project depends on the market conditions and claims to provide jobs. However, the currently Watters Quarry employs less than 10 local people from the nearest community. Automation has improved efficiency of quarries, and will continue to drive down employment needs in the future. Basalt is a common rock in the PNW. The local community will be the loser if Watters Quarry is allowed to proceed by the loss of an important and rare ecosystem with little to gain in the way of jobs.

The permit reports that “alternative sites” were explored for mining. These sites lay direction to the North and several miles to the West. The evaluation of these sites did not include a thorough evaluation of the ecological value as the preferred site, as the North section lacks the huge camas meadow, streams and wetlands. The West site could also be mined for basalt without the expense for mitigation required for that of the South.

Stormwater runoff is also a considerable concern. Knife River, the operator of Angell Quarry was fined by DEQ for turbid discharge into the Mulnomah Channel. Fined for $46,512 in 2017 this fine was for just ONE STREAM. If approved, they will be authorized to manage 12 acres of wetlands and interconnecting streams. Angell Quarry has demonstrated from this large fine that they are unable to adequately manage storm water, and the permit needs to be denied.

The impact to salmon runs will be considerable. Little information in the permit exists for where the holding ponds to manage the muddy water flowing into the site will be. Some of these tributaries flow to the Columbia river which is also important salmon habitat. The impact of the turbidity, temperature, and toxins to the fish downstream does not warrant the proposal at a time when salmon runs are at historical lows.

I strongly support exploring additional sites for the quarry and preserving the proposed site for the enjoyment of future generations.